

Ascension Charity Classic

Thursday, September 5, 2024

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Norwood Hills Country Club

Justin Leonard

Press Conference

Q. All right, Justin, welcome back to St. Louis. Just overall thoughts being back here this week.

JUSTIN LEONARD: Great to be back. Golf course is once again very, very good. Looks like our weather is going to be really nice.

Wouldn't mind it cooling off a little bit, which it's supposed to. But, no, it's great to be back. This tournament gets great support from this area, and Ascension has done a great job building this place up to where it is.

You know, it's always one I look forward to.

Q. Justin, because of the drama that surrounded that putt at the Country Club, no one ever asked you about Troon. Talk about winning a major at Troon, coming from five back on Sunday, blitzing the front nine. Talk about that experience.

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, it was fun. Saturday was a little disappointing. I didn't play great Saturday. Fell behind a little bit. Fortunately only had a couple guys in front of me.

Had a great pairing with Fred Couples. Felt like if I could go out and be aggressive and make some putts that five shots and just two players wasn't insurmountable. Did what I needed to do on the front; you know, made up a little bit of ground.

I didn't really watch a lot of leaderboards during the day. I just wanted to kind of try and keep my foot down. You know, just try and shoot the best round I could.

Back nine, couple of nice saves. Then birdies at 16, 17. You know, walking up 18 I knew I was probably leading or tied for the lead. I wasn't sure.

It wasn't until I made par and walking off the green my caddie said I think at the time I had maybe a two-shot lead.

So a lot of fun and fun to be back this summer and kind of



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relive it. My family was there, my wife and kids. And so to be able to experience Troon with them was really special.

Q. And then you'll remember that in the early '90s there was a lot of talk about the internationals winning all the majors and there was concern about that. Now on this Tour the last few years we've seen a disproportionate number of internationals in the top 10. Any explanation for that?

JUSTIN LEONARD: It's a global game. PGA TOUR is global in nature.

I think everybody from all over the world, their ultimate goal if they're a golfer, serious golfer, is probably to play on the PGA TOUR.

I think that you're seeing that come through with all of the international players and the things that the TOUR does to try and televise and broadcast and appeal to our international partners.

We are starting to see it kind of take shape in the Presidents Cup, which is right around the corner. I'll be an assistant there for Jim Furyk. The international side, they're getting better and better, and so that week is going to be a tough one.

I think that's just a testament to how global the game is and the PGA TOUR in general.

Q. Global outreach is obviously a huge focal point, but so is youth outreach as well. St. Louis in particular, big efforts in trying to get youth involved in this sport. Your guys' involvement in that, how important is that to you personally, specifically in the St. Louis area, as you guys come here year to year?

JUSTIN LEONARD: It is. Our Tour, it's a traveling circus. Every week that we play we have I think significant impact on the community.

This week is no different. Maybe even more so here just because it's a little bit bigger market than most of our tournaments. But we see it every week that we play, you know, from the West Coast to the Midwest, down to Florida. I think that's one of the special things about being involved in golf, is there is so many ways to give back.

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I think that PGA TOUR and PGA TOUR Champions make that a real priority for our tournaments, our staff, the players, and I think we all embrace it.

Q. I think one of the consistent sentiments from golfers on the Champions Tour in particular is you have to bring your A-game obviously Friday through Sunday. Also on Wednesday and Thursday when you have events like these with the fans. Getting to interact with them, it's a huge part of you guys' Tour.

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, I would say this Tour is more of a social tour, and I don't mean like just hanging out and drinking. I mean, I think there is more interaction with our sponsors, with the fans, you know. It's just a more social. Like I think you can get up close and personal out here than you can on the regular TOUR.

I think it's something that the guys embrace and we enjoy it.

Q. How would you sum up your season so far this year?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Not very good. Yeah, it's been a little bit of a struggle. You know, it's interesting. I thought for most of the year I was playing okay. At least my practice was okay. And then, you know, couple loose shots here and there and not taking advantage of things, and I think I kind of reached my breaking point over at Troon actually. Just too many loose shots and things like that on, you know, a very hard golf course in different conditions. But just wasn't happy.

And so I reached out to Mike Thomas, Justin's dad. I knew Justin was playing about an hour and a half behind me on Friday. I asked if he would come take a look. He's worked with my son, Luke, a little bit. I spent a little bit of time around him. Sure enough, he shows me some things on video and a launch monitor and I was like, oh, my gosh.

So anyway, I've been working on those things, trying to -- I was coming way too far from the inside and having to flip the club. You know, when you're sitting there on the range hitting a ball every 20, 30 seconds, you can get to timing it pretty good and it feels okay.

But when you're on the golf course and you put a scorecard in your pocket, it's just -- it wasn't the way to play for me. And so anyway, I've been working on that for about the last six weeks or so. You know, the first couple weeks I feel like I was starting like playing the game left-handed. It was very odd feeling.

Now I think through spending more time with Mike a couple weeks after that and then sending some video to him, back to Randy Smith in Dallas, I know I'm on the right track.

I think I'm to a point where I don't really need to think about my swing. I just need to get on the golf course and play. That's one of the things I focused on last week on my week off: do my practice, but then get out and play 9 holes or somewhere between 9 and 18 holes every day to really just kind of get away from thinking about my swing, where the club needs to be, those kind of things.

And so I think I'm getting a good feel for it, and I think at this point, is look I would love to finish the year off strong. But, you know I think with the changes I've made, you know, I feel like I'm ready to play some good golf.

So, you know being see where it goes, but I know I'm on the right path going forward.

Q. You can tell from your comments the passion and the excitement are there. Is that thrilling for you, knowing you have four or five events left before the Playoffs to kind of put that into practice, what you learned from Mike?

JUSTIN LEONARD: It is. That's the exciting part. You know, as Mike said, I'll only develop the trust on the golf course. That's where it really comes through. So that's why I've been trying to play more.

I've kind of altered the way I've done things at home to give myself more time to be at the golf course. You know, I've gotten the sign off from my wife and kids. Like, dad, you need to put this work in right now.

So put a lot of the work in, and it's nice to have like just a day off here or there to kind of get away from it.

But when I've been at home, at the golf course for six, seven hours a day, I enjoy putting the work in. You know, I think I'm ready to see some results from it.

Q. On this Tour, what if anything has age taken away from you?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Hair I guess. (Laughter.) Not much. I mean, I think that -- you know, I also realize that just logging hours doesn't necessarily mean anything. You know, I've got to be working on the right things and be intentional with how I'm doing that.

And then I think my -- I've kind of reversed -- my tendency was practice at home, but then try and make it to a lacrosse practice or whatever it may be. And then when I

get to tournaments, then I would work real hard. I've tried to reverse that to where work a bit harder at home. I may miss something here or there. Not the important stuff, but some little things here and there. And then just when I get to a tournament, I'm actually like kind of resting and getting my energy back a little bit.

So, you know, I don't know. Look, this game, it's amazing and it's just incredible that all the time that we all put in and we're still out here looking for that little something.

You know, that's just one the great things about the game.

Q. ... does that work to your advantage?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Well, let's put it this way: I haven't really lost length, thanks to technology and changing my workouts and things like that and some things I do in the gym. So that's been nice. Actually hit my irons further now than I did at any point in my regular PGA TOUR career.

You know, you would say patience, but I've had to be very patient. I don't know. I don't know what I've lost. I'm just like right here in St. Louis and trying to figure out the best way to shoot three good rounds of golf.

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